



DOWNTOWN • MILWAUKEE
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT #5

633 West Wisconsin Avenue
Suite 409
Milwaukee, WI 53203

414-276-6696
414-276-6366 (fax)
events@westown.org
www.westown.org

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www.parkmilwaukee.com

May 21, 2009

Testimony in Support of AB 248 and SB 192

The Westown Association of Milwaukee, Inc. represents one of the oldest Business Improvement Districts (BID) in the City of Milwaukee. Westown serves as a liaison between its members, businesses, public officials and others concerned with the economic and cultural development in downtown Milwaukee. Our borders are generally defined as the western portion of downtown, from the Milwaukee River west to Marquette University campus.

Our organization is funded by a combination of public and private dollars which come from the following sources:

- Business Improvement District No. 5 – Assessment dollars collected from commercial properties within the BID boundaries.
- Corporate Sponsorships
- Membership Dues
- Program and Event Revenue

Our membership is 100 strong and is comprised of business owners, property owners, other non-profit organizations and residents. Our sponsors, upon which we heavily rely, include:

- Assurant Health, Hilton City Center, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Marquette University, Miller/Coors, M&I Bank, WE Energies, Midwest Airlines and Time Warner Cable, to name just a few

As a champion of economic and social development in downtown Milwaukee, Westown is responsible for providing growth initiatives, public/private partnerships and special events like the following; all that improve the quality of life and vitality of our district:

- **ParkMilwaukee.Com** – Web site that provides live parking information throughout all of downtown.
- **Design Guidelines** – Created as a guideline for developers to encourage a higher standard of design in the built environment and used by the Department of City Development.
- **St. Patrick's' Day Parade** – State's largest St. Patrick's celebration.
- **River Flicks** – Free, family-friendly outdoor movies on the Milwaukee River.

- **Farmers Market** – Downtown's oldest farmers market which expanded in 2008 to include an indoor winter market located in The Shops of Grand Avenue.

And, **River Rhythms**, which is one of our flag ship events. This popular free, summer concert series has been enjoyed by residents and employees for the past 13 years. River Rhythms hosts a free concert every Wednesday night in Pere Marquette Park from June – August. This event was founded on a “picnic-like” premise where patrons could spread out a blanket, bring their lawn chairs and coolers and listen to music from 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

It is important to note some very important differences between our event, River Rhythms, and another popular concert series known as Jazz in the Park which is sponsored by the East Town Association.

- River Rhythms is a much smaller event and provides a wide variety of music that attracts a loyal following of mature music lovers. Our music selections range from Country to Blues and from Swing to Pop. Our crowds are much smaller in size and generally range from 1,000 – 1,500 patrons each night.
- River Rhythms is held in Pere Marquette Park which is a much larger venue. This park provides a scenic setting along the west bank of the Milwaukee River and is a perfect venue for music. It contains a permanent stage/band stand area and gradual sloped grass area that provides an “amphitheater like” seating area. It has the capacity to accommodate crowds of triple our normal size
- Pere Marquette Park is not surrounded by city streets that contain numerous bars and restaurants, which may contribute to the excessive alcohol consumption issues experienced at Jazz in the Park. Our park abuts the Milwaukee River, the Milwaukee County Historical Society and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel building.
- We do not have crowds that overflow onto the streets and we do not close the surrounding streets as East Town does for Jazz in the Park.

As mentioned above, the ability to gather at River Rhythms with friends and colleagues in a picnic-like manner has become a strong part of the event's character. We have worked tirelessly for 13 years and invested incredible resources to establish this as a successful event. During this time, we are not aware of a single incident involving underage drinking or an alcohol related incident requiring police intervention.

While Westown does sell beer and wine at River Rhythms (under its Class B liquor license), and local vendors sell a variety of food selections, we feel it is critical to maintain the character of this event and permit our loyal patrons to picnic in the park with their own food and beverages, including alcoholic beverages.

Our Board has carefully considered the effects that a change in the carry-in policy might have on our event and has concluded that the increased costs associated

with staffing, security enforcement and additional beverage purchases for re-sale will not be offset by increased revenue sources, such as increased beverage sales. Our budget and cost structure is much different from the East Town Association and cannot easily accommodate such risk.

We are extremely concerned that having to change our carry-in policy will result in decreased attendance, which unlike Jazz in the Park, is something that will harm, not enhance, our event. With today's economic climate, individuals are extremely cautious about spending entertainment dollars. Now is certainly not the time to change the totally free nature of this event.

Because attendance drives sponsorship, we are extremely concerned about the effect a change in policy may have on Sponsorship dollars, which are increasingly difficult to secure. In 2009 alone, Westown has experienced a drop of approximately 25% in Sponsorships. Westown would not be able to host these events without corporate sponsorships. Sponsors realize a greater return on their investment when attendance is thriving and they are recognized for supporting a totally free event for the general public.

Moreover, it is important to look at the bigger picture. River Rhythms was created in part to support economic activity and vitality of downtown Milwaukee. Downtown businesses benefit from the increased activity. Property values are strengthened. Tax dollars and the tax base are increased. And, revenue from this event supports our other programs that further strengthen the downtown district.

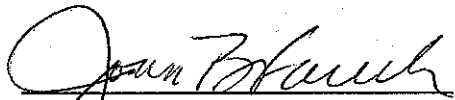
Additionally, we see our organization as providing free public programming for Milwaukee County Parks. Without Westown's efforts, this programming would not be available to the public.

The proposed legislation is not far reaching, but is very limited in scope. Furthermore, it does not require East Town (or similar organizations) to permit carry-ins at special events. Rather, it allows the host organization to determine what is best for its particular event and individual circumstances. Passing this Amendment is really a win-win proposition for both Westown and East Town. Moreover, it requires individual organizations to take responsibility for the nature and character of its events. Westown holds a Class B liquor license and is heavily regulated under those licensing requirements. We take this responsibility seriously and will do nothing to jeopardize our ability to secure this license in the future.

This Amendment will allow Westown Association to continue producing River Rhythms which is not only essential to our organization but more importantly, to the vitality of downtown Milwaukee.

Respectfully,

The Westown Association of Milwaukee, Inc.


Joan B. Farrell, President


Stacie Callies, Executive Director